

INTRODUCTION TO TECHNICAL WRITING

1. DEFINING FACTORS
2. VALUE
3. FORMAT AND DESIGN

TECHNICAL WRITING

A DEFINITION

- “ Communication written for and about business and industry
- “ Characterized by text that is *clear, concise, easy to navigate*
- “ Focuses on products and services
- “ Demands teamwork

Content)

Include such categories as+

- ” Brochures Newsletters
- ” Fliers Resumes
- ” Websites User manuals
- ” *Letters Memos and electronic mail*
- ” *Technical descriptions*
- ” *User manuals (descriptive and analytical)*
- ” *Proposals*
- ” *Reports*

CE OF TECHNICAL WRITING

- “ maintaining good customer relations
(letters etc
- “ ensuring that work is completed on time
(memos etc
- “ providing information and generating
income (fliers, brochures
- “ keeping machinery / equipment working
(descriptions, manuals
- “ defining terminology

IMPORTANCE (Continued)

- “ ensuring that correct equipment is bought (technical descriptions
- “ Providing documentation that work has been completed (reports
- “ Allowing / facilitating participation (proposals, and other forms of oral communication

STYLES IN TECHNICAL WRITING

1. CLARITY

” The *ultimate* goal is **clarity** . remove the need for follow-up inquiries

Clarity is achieved through:

- ” Using specific details
- ” Avoiding abstract terms: some, later, recently
- ” Answering the reporter's questions
- ” avoiding obscure, ostentatious or old-fashioned words (see list p51 Gerson & Gerson)

(continued)

- “ using easily understandable words.
RULE: write to communicate, not confuse;
if the reader must use a dictionary, you are
not writing clearly.
- “ avoiding abbreviations, acronyms, jargon
- “ using nouns rather than pronouns
- “ using the active voice rather than the
passive voice ***

2. CONCISENESS

“ Being concise saves time, aids clarity, is demanded by technology, encourages audience participation. wordy/ long-winded writing encourages skimming and misunderstanding.

3. ACCURACY

“ Accuracy both in grammatical expression and text are essential for effective writing.
RULE: proof-read for correct grammar and content. (Gerson 64f)



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DOCUMENT DESIGN

Formatting and Graphics

ELEMENTS of DESIGN

- “ **Elements** refers to those features appearing on a page. They include: (Pearsall 97ff)
 - fonts . intensity (bold, italics etc), style, size
- “ words, sentences and paragraphs
- “ punctuation

PRINCIPLES of DESIGN

There are three basic areas: the white space, the text and the visuals.

Design concerns the appearance of the page (a combination of placement of text (content) and other elements.

The principles of design are: *simplicity, symmetry, consistency, readability and usability.*

ELEMENTS of DESIGN (Continued)

- “ tables and graphics
- “ white space
- “ highlights . headings,
bulleted/numbered lists,
indentations

ACHIEVING SIMPLICITY

Choose fewer elements rather than many

Do not use too many combinations of
elements

Limit the number of graphics per page (1
or 2)

Avoid clutter:

Simplicity (continued)

- “ Use blank space to separate (and highlight) items
- “ Group related items but leave plenty of space around them
- “ Keep paragraphs so spaced that beginnings and ends are clear

Symmetry .

- ” Refers to the balance or contrast of elements on a page. Consider:
 - . are too many things happening together?
 - . Are pictures and words balanced or all on one half of the page ?
- ” **Consistency --**
- ” Take care that fonts, headings, margins white space, frames are used consistently throughout the presentation

y –

” Refers to how well the information on the page can be seen as a whole, and also as distinct parts. Crowded and/or badly placed elements destroy readability.

” **Usability –**

” The ease with which the reader can access and apply the information is a measure of its readability. Key information should be highlighted:

” Headings, subheadings, indented lists

- ” A significant aspect of usability and readability is the use of ***white space***
- ” ***White space*** prevents documents from looking cramped and crowded, and includes
 - . the space between lines and paragraphs
 - . margins
 - . the background behind a graphic

STANDARDS


- ” Paper size (US) 8.5 x 11
Pearsall ch 5; 97ff)
- ” No more than 50% of the page should
be text (words & graphics)
- ” Margins: 1 . inch margin all around
- ” Do not justify the right margin
- ” All text and visuals should be kept
within the margin

“ Correspondence is single-spaced. Other documents are double-spaced. Though in the business world some documents may use single or space-and-a-half, best-practices ask for double because it looks better, is easier to read, and most importantly, allows the reader/user to make notes/comments.

- “ If a document is single spaced, provide double-spacing between paragraphs, above and below headings, lists, visuals etc .
- “ If a document is single=spaced, allow no extra space, but indent the first line of each paragraph. (MLA)

Typeface (Pearsall p109) Typeface (Pearsall p109)

- ” *“Use standard type sizes. How large the type should be depends on the distance from which the document should be read. The standard type size for body text 18 – 24 inches away from the reader’s eyes is 10 -12 points...*
- ” ***Unless a document is designed for readers who are visually impaired , do not use a type that is larger than 12.***



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Use the same type size and font type for all body text.

HIGHLIGHTING

1. Use Headings

- “ A heading gives immediate access to the main idea. The reader should be able to pick the main ideas out at a glance. Headings must be made to stand out
- “ Headings will have different levels . discuss the ~~step-down~~method. In some kinds of documents (eg: the proposal) headings are given; in others the writer must create.
- “ observe the cautions concerning underlining and italics

” **Use Displayed Lists**

- ” Lists allow concise expression and clarity (note form)
 - . numbered lists show ranking
 - . bulleted lists draws attention to vital components
- ” Caution: use parallel sentences/phrases throughout the list
- ” Use the same spacing for all lists throughout a document

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“ A graphic (picture, graph, chart, table) helps the reader to gather multiple bits of information and to see relationships in a short time, with minimal reading. The writer needs to consider the following:

- “ - the purpose
- “ - the variety appropriate
- “ - the number of graphics needed
- “ - the placement (on the page; proximity to associated text)
- “ - complexity of content